PENROD

CHAPTER XVII.

"Little Gentleman."

MEANWHILE the brooding Penrod pursued his homeward way; no great distance, but long enough for several one sided conflicts with malign insulters made of thin air. "You better not call me that!" he muttered. "You just try it, and you'll get what other people got when they tried it. You better not ack fresh with me. Oh, you will, will you?" He delivered a vicious kick full upon the shins of an iron fence post, which suffered little, though Penrod instantly regretted his indiscretion. "Oof!" he grunted, hopping, and went on after bestowing a look of awful hostility upon the fence post. "I guess you'll know better next time," he said in parting to this antagonist. "You just let me catch you around here again and I'll"— His voice sank to inarticulate but ominous murmurings. He was in a dangerous mood.

Nearing home, however, his belligerent spirit was diverted to happier interests by the discovery that some workmen had left a caldron of tar in the cross street close by his father's stable. He tested it, but found it inedible; also as a substitute for professional chewing gum it was unsatisfactory, being insufficiently boiled down and too thin, though of a pleasant, lukewarm temperature. But it had an excess of one quality—it was sticky. It was the stickiest tar Penrod had ever used for any purposes whatsoever, and nothing upon which he wiped his hands served to rid them of it, neither his polka dotted shirtwaist nor his knickerbockers; neither the fence nor even Duke, who came unthinkingly wagging out to greet him and retired wiser.

Nevertheless tar is tar. Much can be done with it, no matter what its condition. So Penrod lingered by the caldron, though from a neighboring yard could be heard the voices of comrades, including that of Sam Williams. On the ground about the caldron were scattered chips and sticks and bits of wood to the number of a great multitude. Penrod mixed quantities of this refuse into the tar and interested himself in seeing how much of it he could keep moving in slow swirls upon the ebon surface.

Other surprises were arranged for the absent workmen. The caldron was almost full and the surface of the tar near the rim. Penrod endeavored to ascertain how many pebbles and brickbats dropped in would cause an overflow. Laboring heartily to this end, he had almost accomplished it when he received the suggestion for an experiment on a much larger scale. Embedded at the corner of a grass plot across the street was a whitewashed stone the size of a small watermelon and serving no purpose whatever save the questionable one of decoration. It was easily pried up with a stick, though getting it to the caldron tested the full strength of the ardent laborer. Instructed to perform such a task, he would have sincerely maintained its impossibility, but now, as it was unbidden and promised rather destructive results, he set about it with unconquerable energy, feeling certain that he would be rewarded with a mighty splash. Perspiring, grunting vehemently, his back aching and all muscles strained, he progressed in short stages until the big stone lay at the base of the caldron. He rested a moment, panting, then lifted the stone and was bending his shoulders for the heave that would lift it over the rim when a sweet, taunting voice close behind him startled him cruelly.

"How do you do, little gentleman?"

Penrod squawked, dropped the stone and shouted, "Shut up, you dern fool!" purely from instinct, even before his about face made him aware who had so spitefully addressed him.

It was Marjorie Jones. Always dainty, and prettily dressed, she was in speckless and starchy white today, and a refreshing picture she made, with the new shorn and powerfully scented Mitchy-Mitch clinging to her hand. They had stolen up behind the toiler and now stood laughing together in sweet merriment. Since the passing of Penrod's Rupe Collins period he had experienced some severe qualms at the recollection of his last meeting with Marjorie and his Apache behavior—in truth, his heart instantly became as wax at sight of her and he would have offered her fair speech. But, alas, in Marjorie's wonderful eyes there shone a consciousness of new powers for his undoing, and she denied him opportunity!

"Oh, oh!" she cried, mocking his pained outcry. "What a way for a little gentleman to talk! Little gentlemen don't say wicked"—

"Marjorie!" Penrod, enraged and dismayed, felt himself stung beyond all endurance. Insult from her was bitterer to endure than from any other. "Don't you call me that again!"

"Why not, little gentleman?"

He stamped his foot. "You better stop!"

Marjorie sent into his furious face her lovely, spiteful laughter.

"Little gentleman, little gentleman, little gentleman!" she said deliberately. "How's the little gentleman this afternoon? Hello, little gentleman!"

Penrod, quite beside himself, danced eccentrically. "Dry up!" he howled. "Dry up, dry up, dry up, dry up!"

Mitchy-Mitch shouted with delight and applied a finger to the side of the caldron—a finger immediately snatched away and wiped upon a handkerchief by his fastidious sister.

"'Ittle gellamun!" said Mitchy-Mitch.

"You better look out!" Penrod whirled upon this small offender with grim satisfaction. Here was at least something male that could without dishonor be held responsible. "You say that again and I'll give you the worst"—

"You will not!" snapped Marjorie, instantly vitriolic. "He'll say just whatever he wants to, and he'll say it just as much as he wants to. Say it again, Mitchy-Mitch!"

"'Ittle gellamun!" said Mitchy-Mitch promptly.

"Ow-yah!" Penrod's tone production was becoming affected by his mental condition. "You say that again and I'll"—

"Go on, Mitchy-Mitch," cried Marjorie. "He can't do a thing. He don't dare! Say it some more, Mitchy-Mitch—say it a whole lot!"

Mitchy-Mitch, with his small, fat face shining with confidence in his immunity, complied.

"'Ittle gellamun!" he squeaked malevolently. "'Ittle gellamun! 'Ittle gellamun! 'Ittle gellamun!"

The desperate Penrod bent over the whitewashed rock, lifted it and then—outdoing Porthos, John Ridd and Ursus in one miraculous burst of strength—heaved it into the air.

Marjorie screamed.

But it was too late. The big stone descended into the precise midst of the caldron and Penrod got his mighty splash. It was far, far beyond his expectations.

Spontaneously there were grand and awful effects—volcanic spectacles of nightmare and eruption. A black sheet of eccentric shape rose out of the caldron and descended upon the three children, who had no time to evade it.

After it fell, Mitchy-Mitch, who stood nearest the caldron, was the thickest, though there was enough for all. Bre'r Rabbit would have fled from any of them.

When Marjorie and Mitchy-Mitch got their breath, they used it vocally, and seldom have more penetrating sounds issued from human throats. Coincidentally Marjorie, quite berserk, laid hands upon the largest stick within reach and fell upon Penrod with blind fury. He had the presence of mind to flee, and they went round and round the caldron, while Mitchy-Mitch feebly endeavored to follow—his appearance, in this pursuit, being pathetically like that of a bug fished out of an inkwell, alive but discouraged.

Attracted by the riot, Samuel Williams made his appearance, vaulting a fence and was immediately followed by Maurice Levy and Georgie Bassett. They stared incredulously at the extraordinary spectacle before them.

"Little gen-til-man!" shrieked Marjorie, with a wild stroke that landed full upon Penrod's tarry cap.

"Oooch!" bleated Penrod.

"It's Penrod!" shouted Sam Williams, recognizing him by the voice. For an instant he had been in some doubt.

"Penrod Schofield!" exclaimed Georgie Bassett. "What does this mean?" That was Georgie's style, and had helped to win him his title.

Marjorie leaned, panting upon her stick. "I cu-called—uh—him—oh!" she sobbed—"I called him a lul-little—oh—gentleman! And oh—lul-look!—oh, lul look at my du-dress! Lul-look at Mumitchy—oh—Mitch—oh!"

Unexpectedly she smote again—with results—and then, seizing the indistinguishable hand of Mitchy-Mitch, she ran wailing homeward down the street.

"'Little gentleman?'" said Georgie Bassett, with some evidences of disturbed complacency. "Why, that's what they call me!"

"Yes, and you are one, too!" shouted the maddened Penrod. "But you better not let anybody call me that! I've stood enough around here for one day, and you can't run over me, Georgie Bassett. Just you put that in your gizzard and smoke it!"

"Anybody has a perfect right," said Georgie, with dignity, "to call a person a little gentleman. There's lots of names nobody ought to call, but this one's a nice"—

"You better look out!"

Unavenged bruises were distributed all over Penrod, both upon his body and upon his spirit. Driven by subtle forces he had dipped his hands in catastrophe and disaster. It was not for a Georgie Bassett to beard him. Penrod was about to run amuck.

"I haven't called you a little gentleman, yet," said Georgie. "I only said it. Anybody's got a right to say it."

"Not around me! You just try it again and"—

"I shall say it," returned Georgie, "all I please. Anybody in this town has a right to say 'little gentleman'"—

Bellowing insanely, Penrod plunged his right hand into the caldron, rushed upon Georgie and made awful work of his hair and features.

Alas, it was but the beginning! Sam Williams and Maurice Levy screamed with delight and, simultaneously infected, danced about the struggling pair, shouting frantically:

"Little gentleman! Little gentleman! Sick him, Georgie! Sick him, little gentleman! Little gentleman! Little gentleman!"

The infuriated outlaw turned upon them with blows and more tar, which gave Georgie Bassett his opportunity and later seriously impaired the purity of his fame. Feeling himself hopelessly tarred, he dipped both hands repeatedly into the caldron and applied his gatherings to Penrod. It was bringing coals to Newcastle, but it helped to assuage the just wrath of Georgie.

The four boys gave a fine imitation of the Laocoon group complicated by an extra figure—frantic splutterings and chokings, strange cries and stranger words issued from this tangle; hands dipped lavishly into the inexhaustible reservoir of tar, with more and more picturesque results. The caldron had been elevated upon bricks and was not perfectly balanced, and under a heavy impact of the struggling group it lurched and went partly over, pouring forth a Stygian tide which formed a deep pool in the gutter.

It was the fate of Master Roderick Bitts, that exclusive and immaculate person, to make his appearance upon the chaotic scene at this juncture. All in the cool of a white "sailor suit," he turned aside from the path of duty—which led straight to the house of a maiden aunt—and paused to hop with joy upon the sidewalk. A repeated epithet, continuously half panted, half squawked, somewhere in the nest of gladiators, caught his ear, and he took it up excitedly, not knowing why.

"Little gentleman!" shouted Roderick, jumping up and down in childish glee. "Little gentleman! Little gentleman! Lit"—

A frightful figure tore itself free from the group, encircled this innocent bystander with a black arm and hurled him headlong. Full length and flat on his face went Roderick into the Stygian pool. The frightful figure was Penrod. Instantly the pack flung themselves upon him again, and, carrying them with him, he went over upon Roderick, who from that instant was as active a belligerent as any there.

Thus began the great tar fight, the origin of which proved afterward so difficult for parents to trace owing to the opposing accounts of the combatants. Marjorie said Penrod began it; Penrod said Mitchy-Mitch began it; Sam Williams said Georgie Bassett began it; Georgie and Maurice Levy said Penrod began it; Roderick Bitts, who had not recognized his first assailant, said Sam Williams began it.

Nobody thought of accusing the barber. But the barber did not begin it. It was the fly on the barber's nose that

A Frightful Figure Tore Itself Free From the Group, Encircled This Innocent Bystander With a Black Arm.

began it, though, of course, something else began the fly. Somehow we never manage to hang the real offender.

The end came only with the arrival of Penrod's mother, who had been having a painful conversation by telephone with Mrs. Jones, the mother of Marjorie, came forth to seek her errant son. It is a mystery how she was able to pick out her own, for by the time she got there his voice was too hoarse to be recognizable.

(To be continued.)

Trade With Peaceful Lands

The enormous expansion of the export trade of the United States is not wholly due to the military necessities of the European nations at war. A very large part of it goes to feed and clothe these nations and to supply them with munitions, but in the meantime our trade with other sections of the world is growing rapidly, notwithstanding the serious handicaps under which we labor in the extension of our commerce. Our exports for June, excluding those to Europe, show an increase of 30 per cent above those of June, 1914. The Americas publishes an interesting table showing the growth of our international trade, and the facts it discloses are surprising. Our exports to the other countries of North America, including the West Indies, increased from thirty millions in January to thirty-six millions in June; to South America, from seven millions in January to nearly fourteen millions in June; to Oceania, from five and a half millions in January to nine and a half millions in June. Asia and Africa have both increased their purchases from us, but not to the same extent.

The North American business increased 35 per cent in the half year, that with Oceania nearly 80 per cent, and that with South America practically 100 per cent. In the latter continent the greatest growth has been with Argentina, our sales in that progressive country increasing from $1,707,222 in January to $5,250,300 in June. Our exports to Brazil almost doubled in the six months, and to Chili increased 40 per cent. In the West Indies, Cuba showed a gain of 20 per cent and Santo Domingo of more than 100 per cent.

These figures are especially gratifying at this time because they indicate a shifting of the trade routes of the world to our advantage. It is not to be supposed that we can hold all that we absorb while our greatest competitors are absorbed in war, but if, with this opportunity of making our products and our resources known, we do not retain a great deal of this trade and lay the foundations for a much greater expansion in the future, it will be our own fault. We are taking a much larger interest in international commerce, we are learning its requirements, we gradually making banking connctions; the end of the war should find us so firmly intrenched that England, Germany nor France can run us out.—Globe-Democrat.

ALWAYS BEAR TO THE EAST

Objects Dropped Into "Bottomless Pits" Are Inevitably Attracted In That Direction.

Because the earth whirls so fast, rocks dropped into the very deep shafts of Michigan copper mines disappear on the way down. At some of the shafts, which are nearly a mile deep in a straight drop, it is the general belief that a load of broken stone can be dumped into the hole at the top without causing any injury to a man at the bottom.

On account of the motion of the earth a rock will not fall perfectly straight, but will bear to the east, lodging in the timber lining or perhaps bounding from wall to wall until it is broken up or caught by some projection.

A group of experimenters from the Michigan College of Mines verified this by careful tests with steel balls. One ball was hung by a thread over the hole, about four feet from the east side, and the thread burned. A clay box had been placed at the bottom of the shaft to catch the ball, but it never appeared. Another ball was then dropped, by the same method, a little farther away from the east edge, and this ball, also, did not get to the bottom. Careful search located the first ball imbedded in the timbers 800 feet down, but the second ball never has been found.

As the earth revolves the surface is moving eastward at a rate which varies with the latitude. Down in the earth the rate is not so fast, on the same principle that a point on the tire of a wheel revolves faster than one on a spoke. Consequently, at the distance of a mile below the surface the speed rate is less than at the surface. The falling ball, however, continues to move toward the east at the same velocity it had on the earth's surface.—Saturday Evening Post.